

## Personalise and remove friction for customers, to be successful, GCC travel companies told at ATM

- *Gulf travel operators must use disruptive technologies to meet customers' evolving expectations, according to experts speaking at ATM 2019*
- *Artificial intelligence and machine learning are helping to deliver more personalised offerings for travellers*
- *GCC hotels can increase revenues by 10 per cent and reduce costs by 15 per cent through personalisation technology, according to research*

Gulf-based travel and hospitality companies that use disruptive technologies to boost personalisation and remove friction for customers are likely to become future market leaders, according to experts speaking at [Arabian Travel Market \(ATM\) 2019](#).

In a panel discussion titled '[The Big Picture – Who Will Sell Travel Best in the Future?](#)', which took place on ATM's Global Stage, representatives from [Booking.com](#), [Sabre Corporation](#), [Google](#), [Facebook](#) and [Emirates](#) explored the potential benefits and pitfalls of technology implementation in the Gulf's tourism sector.

While innovations such as the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and personalisation technology have the potential to boost efficiency across the industry, panellists emphasised that operators should always consider how new applications are likely to impact the customer experience.

[Fouad Talaat](#), Regional Manager of Partner Services – MEA, Booking.com, said: "Some of us think we're in an era of disruption but I think we've passed that already. I think we're in an era of powerful customers."

"We think of ourselves as a customer-first AI company. This means that the application of any new technology is done to enhance the experience for our customers. We don't experiment with emerging technologies for the sake of it. If an innovation doesn't take friction away, we don't invest in it."

Airports and airlines increased investments in information technology (IT) from 5.6 per cent in 2017 to 7.5 per cent in 2018, accounting for an overall investment of USD 30 billion. By implementing IoT technology to optimise flight itineraries, the industry could

save the same amount in fuel savings alone over the next 15 years, according to research conducted by [Colliers](#) on behalf of ATM 2019.

In addition to efficiency savings, panellists noted that the GCC's tourism industry must identify areas in which disruptive technologies can be implemented to ensure a seamless customer experience.

[Terry Kane](#), Head of Travel, Auto, Telco and Financial Services – Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan, Facebook, said: "In travel today, there is still an enormous amount of friction at every step of the journey and mobile solutions can help to remove a lot of this. Expectations are constantly changing. The moment a company solves a friction-related problem, customers' expectations are reset.

"For example, if I want the most personal experience possible, it's probably going to be through WhatsApp or Facebook. We should be able to reserve flights, get our boarding passes and book accommodation through WhatsApp or Facebook directly [...] These platforms should be your personal concierge for multiple things in life, and travel is certainly one of those areas."

The comprehensive implementation of personalisation technology could also lead to significant benefits for the Middle East's hotel industry, according to Colliers, increasing revenues by more than 10 per cent and reducing costs by more than 15 per cent.

[Ben Vinod](#), Senior VP and Chief Scientist, Sabre Corporation, said: "We live in an AI, machine learning-driven landscape, so a key focus for our sector is intelligent retailing. Consumers want to see content that is relevant for them; they don't want to see generic information. This is something that will change over the next couple of years.

"One example is that you don't always have to show the lowest price on your website. You may want to show the best price based on the customer's preferences. Segmentation is important because it allows you to deliver relevant content to a portion of the population. We also see a need for one-to-one personalisation. We want to be able to give you a tailored response that is meaningful to you – as a segment of one."

Running until Wednesday, 1 May, ATM 2019 will see more than 2,500 exhibitors showcase their products and services at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC). Viewed by industry professionals as a barometer for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) tourism sector, last year's edition of ATM welcomed 39,000 people, representing the largest exhibition in the history of the show.

For full details of the ATM 2019 event programme, visit: <https://arabiantravelmarket.wtm.com/en/events/Events-programme>.

For more information about ATM 2019, visit: <https://arabiantravelmarket.wtm.com>.

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### **About Arabian Travel Market (ATM)**

**Arabian Travel Market** is the leading international travel and tourism event in the Middle East for inbound and outbound tourism professionals. ATM 2018 attracted almost 40,000 industry professionals, with representation from 141 countries over the four days. The 25<sup>th</sup> edition of ATM showcased over 2,500 exhibiting companies across 12 halls at Dubai World Trade Centre. Arabian Travel Market 2019 will take place in Dubai from Sunday, 28 April to Wednesday, 1 May, 2019. To find out more, please visit: [www.arabiantravelmarket.wtm.com](http://www.arabiantravelmarket.wtm.com).

### **About Arabian Travel Week**

**Arabian Travel Week** is an umbrella brand comprising four co-located shows including Arabian Travel Market and ILTM Arabia, as well as CONNECT Middle East, India and Africa – a new route development forum launching this year and ATM's first ever consumer event ATM Holiday Shopper. Providing a renewed focus for the Middle East's travel and tourism sector – under one roof over the course of one week – the inaugural Arabian Travel Week will take place at Dubai World Trade Centre from Saturday 27 April to Wednesday 1 May, 2019. For more information visit: [arabiantravelweek.com](http://arabiantravelweek.com).

### **About CONNECT**

**CONNECT** Route Development Forum delivers a total networking experience, bringing together airports, airlines and aviation suppliers in a format that offers formal one-to-one pre-arranged meetings, engaging industry seminars together with social opportunities to cement relationships with existing clients and engage with new ones. Created and organised by The Airport Agency-France, CONNECT is now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year and set to attract more 650 participants in June 2019 at its flagship event taking place in Cagliari, Sardinia. For more information, visit: [www.connect-aviation.com](http://www.connect-aviation.com).

The inaugural **CONNECT Middle East, India and Africa** event will be the brand's first and only networking forum in the Middle East. Ideally located in Dubai to address the booming aviation market of the Middle East, it will bring together the aviation and the tourism industries, which are the backbone and catalyst of economic development. For more information, visit: [www.connect-aviation.com/2019-meia/](http://www.connect-aviation.com/2019-meia/).

### **About ATM Holiday Shopper**

**ATM Holiday Shopper** is the brand-new travel event for consumers offering the very best travel and tourism discounts and deals, plus the chance to learn about a range of emerging and unexplored destinations and activities from destinations around the world. The inaugural event will take place in Hall 1 of the Dubai World Trade Centre on Saturday, 27 April, 2019 from 12:00 – 20:00. For more information, visit: [www.atmholidayshopper.com](http://www.atmholidayshopper.com).

### **About ILTM Arabia**

**International Luxury Travel Market Arabia** is an exclusive event for those looking to attract HNW travellers from the Middle East to their destination. Returning for its third year, ILTM will allow international luxury suppliers and key luxury buyers to connect via one-to-one pre-scheduled appointments and networking opportunities. ILTM will take place on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> April and Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019. For more information, visit: [www.iltm.com/arabia/](http://www.iltm.com/arabia/).

### **About Reed Exhibitions**

[Reed Exhibitions](http://www.reedexhibitions.com) is the world's leading events business, enhancing the power of face to face through data and digital tools at over 500 events a year, in more than 30 countries, attracting more than seven million participants.

### **About Reed Travel Exhibitions**

[Reed Travel Exhibitions](#) is the world's leading travel and tourism events organiser with a growing portfolio of more than 22 international travel and tourism trade events in Europe, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Our events are market leaders in their sectors, whether it is global and regional leisure travel trade events, or specialist events for meetings, incentives, conference, events (MICE) industry, business travel, luxury travel, travel technology as well as golf, spa and ski travel. We have over 35 years' experience in organising world-leading travel exhibitions.

### **About World Travel Market**

[World Travel Market](#) (WTM) portfolio comprises six leading B2B events across four continents, generating more than USD 7 billion of industry deals. These events include:

**WTM London**, a must-attend three-day exhibition for the worldwide travel and tourism industry. About 50,000 senior travel industry professionals, government ministers and international media visit ExCeL London every November, generating about GBP 3.4 billion of travel industry contracts. The next edition will take place from 4-6 November, 2019. For more information, visit: <http://london.wtm.com/>.

**Travel Forward**, a new travel technology event co-located with WTM London and part of the WTM portfolio of events. The inaugural Travel Forward conference, exhibition and buyer programme will take place from 4-6 November, 2019 at ExCeL London, showcasing next-generation technology for travel and hospitality. For more information, visit: <http://travelforward.wtm.com/>.

**WTM Latin America**, an exhibition that attracts about 9,000 senior executives and generates about USD 374 million of new business. Taking place in Sao Paulo, Brazil, this show attracts a global audience to meet and shape the direction of the travel industry. More than 8,000 unique visitors attend the event to network, negotiate and discover the latest industry news. The next edition will take place in 2020. For more information, visit: <http://latinamerica.wtm.com/>.

**WTM Africa**, which was launched in 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa. Nearly 5,000 travel industry professionals attend Africa's leading inbound and outbound travel and tourism market. WTM Africa delivers a proven mix of hosted buyers, media, pre-scheduled appointments, on-site networking, evening functions and invited travel trade visitors. The next event will take place in 2020. For more information, visit: <http://africa.wtm.com/>.

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